

TRANSFORM YOUR CIVIC SPACE THE REFORMERS' PROGRAM

Open
Government
Partnership



CIVIC
SPACE
LAB

Empowering Governments to Strengthen Democratic Foundations

Civic space is a fundamental foundation for economic growth, social progress and democratic health. The Civic Space Lab Reformers' Program offers a unique opportunity for forward-thinking governments to strengthen their civic environment with expert support every step of the way.

Why Civic Space Matters

Open civic space isn't just a democratic ideal—it delivers tangible benefits:

- Faster economic growth and reduced inequality.
- Improved public services and better crisis response.
- Reduced social conflict and stronger democratic values.
- Enhanced political participation and reduced corruption.

Essential Civic Freedoms

- Freedom of Assembly: Enabling peaceful gatherings and protecting demonstrators.
- Freedom of Association: Simplifying CSO registration and operations.
- Freedom of Expression: Protecting critical voices while maintaining reasonable limits.
- Media Freedom: Ensuring journalistic independence and safety.
- Digital Rights: Safeguarding online freedoms and privacy.



What Your Government Will Receive

- **Expert Facilitation:** Dedicated specialists guiding your reform journey with customised support.
- **Technical Assistance:** Specialists in legislative frameworks, policy development, and institutional design from partners in national and international institutions.
- **Peer Learning:** Connect with successful reformers who understand your challenges.
- **Funding Connections:** Support to secure implementation resources from international donors.

Is Your Government Ready?

We're seeking partners with:

- Ministerial-level commitment to enhancing civic freedoms.
- Active reform agenda and implementation capacity.
- Willingness to collaborate with civil society.

Apply today with a letter from a government minister or equivalent institutional leader outlining your commitment to strengthening civic space!



Frequently Asked Questions

Why Does Civic Space Matter?

Civic space is vital for economic, environmental, and social outcomes.

As outlined in OGP's skeptics guide:

- Improving democratic freedoms correlates with faster economic growth.
- Restricted civic space leads to higher inequality.
- Citizen involvement improves public services' quality and accessibility, while restricted civic space hampers epidemic response.
- Restrictions on civil society increase the likelihood of social conflict.
- A free media strengthens democratic values, while media repression signals democratic decline.
- Independent journalism promotes political participation.
- A free press and civil society are essential for fighting corruption.

Open civic space is also fundamental to open government and democracy.

Without it, people and civil society organisations cannot meaningfully participate in decision-making, scrutinise government actions, or hold politicians accountable.

In today's rapidly changing technological and geopolitical landscape, vibrant civic space provides the foundation that enables democracies to adapt, renew legitimacy, reduce polarisation, and deliver for citizens.

What is Civic Space?

Civic space refers to the freedom of citizens, civil society organisations, journalists and others to operate, assemble, participate and express themselves freely, without fear of censorship, reprisal or oppression. It is an essential foundation of democracy and open government.

The Reformers' Program supports these core components of civic space:

1 - Freedom of Assembly – The right of citizens to gather peacefully in public and private spaces, including:

- Organising protests and demonstrations.
- Clear, reasonable regulations for public gatherings.
- Protection from excessive force during lawful assemblies.

2 - Freedom of Association – The ability to form and join groups for lawful purposes, including:

- Straightforward processes for registering civil society organisations.
- Protection from unnecessary interference in group activities.
- Access to resources, including funding.

3 - Freedom of Expression – The right to share opinions and ideas without fear of punishment, covering:

- Protection for those who criticise government policies.
- Reasonable limits on harmful speech.
- Access to public information.

3 - Media and Press Freedom – Independent operation of journalism and news outlets, including:

- Editorial independence.
- Journalist safety and source protection.
- Diverse media ownership.

4 - Digital Rights – Extension of civic freedoms to online spaces, including:

- Reliable internet access and protection against internet shutdowns.
- Data privacy protections.
- Freedom from arbitrary surveillance.

The Reformers' Program also provides support on two additional civic space components when they're included as part of a wider package of reforms

5 - Democratic Participation – Meaningful involvement in governance and decision-making, including:

- Dialogue mechanisms between governments and citizens.
- Opportunities for public participation in policy development.
- Mechanisms for citizen oversight and accountability.

6 - Gender and Inclusion – Ensuring equal civic space access for all, including:

- Fair representation in democratic processes.
- Protection of rights for marginalised groups.
- Accessible participation mechanisms for all demographics.

What is the Reformers' Program?

The Reformers' Program provides comprehensive, tailored support to governments to address civic space challenges and strengthen civic freedoms. We help you design and implement effective reforms that create sustainable improvements in civic space while building lasting capacity for productive government-civil society collaboration.



What Your Government Will Receive

Expert Facilitation: Dedicated specialists to guide your reform process and maintain momentum.

- Customised support specific to your country's context and institutional environment.
- Practical implementation assistance to turn policy into reality.

Technical Expertise: Access to specialists in civic space standards and best practices.

- Assistance with legislative drafting and policy development.
- Consultation on institutional design and governance structures.
- Comprehensive assessment of your regulatory frameworks.

Peer Learning Network: Connect with other government reformers who have successfully navigated similar challenges.

- Direct advice from officials who understand your position.
- Structured relationships with clear objectives and measurable outcomes.

Resource Mobilisation: Support for securing implementation funding.

- Introductions to international donors and partners interested in supporting civic space reforms.
- Assistance with developing compelling funding proposals.

Recognition: Showcasing of transformational reforms.

- Consideration for the Open Gov Challenge on Civic Space.
- Visibility through OGP communications channels.
- Strong performers within the Reformers' Program will be invited to join the Civic Space Lab Leaders' Group.



Who is the Reformers' Program for?

Is your government committed to strengthening civic freedoms? The Reformers' Program welcomes partnership at a range of levels:

Countries undertaking meaningful democratic reforms or working to improve civic space conditions.

Administrations with demonstrated ministerial-level commitment to addressing civic space challenges through concrete policy actions.

Government institutions with a mandate to enhance civic participation and protect democratic freedoms.

What is the output?

As part of the Reformers' Program, your government will receive support to develop one of the following deliverables, tailored to your specific context and needs:

- **Civic Space Strategy** – A comprehensive, high-level framework addressing all fundamental civic freedoms, developed collaboratively with civil society and containing concrete actions to strengthen your civic environment.
- **Civic Space Action Plan** – A focused set of practical, implementable reforms co-created with civil society to address priority civic space challenges in your country.
- **Targeted Civic Space Reform** – Specialised support to design and implement a specific reform addressing a critical civic space challenge, such as protest law modernisation or civil society registration improvement.

How can countries apply to join?

To apply to join the Reformers' Program, please submit a letter from a government minister or equivalent institutional leader that outlines:

- Current civic space challenges that you wish to address.
- Specific areas of focus (e.g., freedom of assembly, association, expression, media freedom, or digital rights).
- Existing reform initiatives related to civic space that are already underway.
- Ministerial-level support and institutional framework available to implement reforms.
- Willingness to collaborate with civil society organisations in developing solutions.

- Expected outcomes and how the Reformers' Program would help achieve them.
- Preferred type of deliverable (Civic Space Strategy, Civic Space Action Plan, or Targeted Civic Space Reform).
- Commitment to knowledge sharing with other participating countries.

How will countries be selected?

Is your government right for the Reformers' Program? We are looking for:

- **Strong Political Commitment:** Ministerial-level dedication to enhancing civic freedoms and democratic governance.
- **Active Reform Agenda:** Current implementation or planning of meaningful democratic improvements.
- **Institutional Framework:** Government bodies with clear authority to strengthen civic space and participation.
- **Specific Focus Areas:** Identifiable challenges in freedoms of assembly, association, expression, media, or digital rights that our expertise can address.
- **Partnership Mindset:** Willingness to collaborate with civil society organisations in developing solutions.
- **Implementation Capacity:** Ability to implement agreed reforms within a reasonable timeframe.
- **Regional Considerations:** We aim to support governments across diverse geographical regions
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Capacity to both share insights and learn from other participating countries

Applications will be evaluated against these criteria by a selection panel comprising members of the OGP Support Unit, Steering Committee and key partner organisations.

The number of countries selected will depend upon the availability of sufficient funding and resources to deliver effective program support.

Transform your civic space.

Join the Reformers'

Program today!



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